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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETINGS WITH PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS

REF: A. CAIRO 2310
[B](#). CAIRO 1066
[C](#). CAIRO 2454

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In recent meetings at the Egyptian People's Assembly with parliamentary speaker Fathi Surour and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee Mustafa el Fekki, the parliamentarians previewed Egypt's legislative priorities for the new parliamentary session (which began mid-November), including new laws regarding health insurance, organ transplants, and the addition of new seats to parliament specifically for women. Ambassador Scobey urged that both the Unified Law on Construction of Places of Worship (which would create equal procedures for the building of mosques and churches) and the delayed Counter-Terror (CT) law be put on the parliamentary agenda. Both Egyptian interlocutors were non-committal. The Ambassador also protested in both meetings the barring of an internet activist from traveling to New York for the recent "Alliance of Youth Movements Summit." End summary.

SITTING DOWN WITH THE PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER

[1](#)2. (C) During their December 3 meeting, in response to the Ambassador's query regarding legislative priorities for the new session of parliament (which opened in mid-November), Surour referenced President Hosni Mubarak's November 23 speech to a joint session of parliament, in which he highlighted the need for new legislation concerning health insurance, organ transplants, the creation of non-profit private universities, and adding additional seats to the People's Assembly designated specifically for women. (Note: Although Surour did not offer details, per ref A, the planned new law will likely create two new legislative seats specifically for women, for each of Egypt's 26 provinces. This would result in an additional 52 seats in Egypt's assembly, which currently has 454 members. End note).

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador asked Surour whether the CT law, which was not put before parliament during the last session, would resurface this year. (Note: The CT law was planned to replace Egypt's Emergency Law, which has been in force since 1981. Mubarak and some of his ministers pledged in 2006 that the Emergency Law would be lifted in 2008. Per ref B, the GOE did not put the CT law before parliament as expected, and instead in May re-extended the Emergency Law for an additional two years. End note). Surour replied that Mubarak did not mention the CT law in his opening speech to parliament, and "as that speech indicated the priorities of the president's legislative agenda," Surour did not anticipate the assembly would be debate the law this session.

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador also inquired if the Unified Law on Construction of Places of Worship would be put on the

parliamentary floor this session. Surour answered that Mubarak had not mentioned the law as a priority for the session. He noted that he had no problem in principle with the law, but that the challenge would be in implementation: "We want to assure security to our Christian population. We have many extremists in Egypt, and if churches are built next to mosques in villages, there will undoubtedly be subsequent problems for Christians. So, our reservations are based on concern for the protection of Christians." The Ambassador replied that a law is needed that does not discriminate between Muslims and Christians, and provides for equal procedures for the building of new religious buildings. She noted that Christians ought to be able to count on their government to quickly approve the building of new churches. Surour noted that former UNSYG and current head of the Egyptian National Council on Human Rights, Boutrous Boutrous Ghali, has sent him a draft law, but that Surour had not yet received a draft text from the government. He reiterated that, "our reservations are not against Christians, but are driven by our need to provide for the security of Christians." The Ambassador noted that political leadership is needed to move the law forward; Surour answered that, "we will find a solution."

15. (C) Sounding familiar notes critical of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the USG's "deaf ear" to Egypt's warnings, Surour expressed his "optimism" at the change in U.S. administrations. On other security issues, the Ambassador flagged the significance of the recently concluded SOFA with Iraq, and urged that Egyptian leaders publicly acknowledge this constructive development. Surour said that he had recently spoken before the Pan-African parliament

CAIRO 00002484 002 OF 002

regarding piracy issues, and that he had urged that African maritime troops be sent to the Red Sea. He cited "widespread rumors" that "some countries" are encouraging piracy, "so that they can use it as an excuse to put their military ships on patrol in the Red Sea." The Ambassador roundly belied the rumors.

16. (C) The Ambassador highlighted USG concern about Egyptian security services on December 2 barring Internet activist Ahmed Nassar from traveling to NY for the December 3-5 "Alliance of Youth Movements Summit" (Ref C). Surour averred that this was the first time he had heard of the incident, and that "I disagree with him being prevented from traveling."

MEETING WITH THE CHAIR OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

17. (C) In her December 2 meeting with Fekki, the Ambassador also urged that the Unified Law on Construction of Places of Worship and the CT law be priorities on this session's legislative agenda. Fekki was non-committal. The Ambassador inquired about the likelihood of the Election law being changed, per discussion last session regarding the possible shift from a single-district constituency electoral system, to a party list/proportional representation system. In reply, Fekki averred that "the electoral system will not be changed. We will keep it as individuals running for office, not party lists." The Ambassador raised USG concern about Internet activist Nassar being prevented from traveling to NY. She also urged that Fekki and his colleagues engage in parliamentary exchanges with Iraqi parliamentarians.
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